

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-03 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 L-02 CIAE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY OSLO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9339

SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USMISSION NATO

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

OSAF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L OSLO 0757

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: BEXP, MASS, NATO, NO, SW

SUBJ: AIRCRAFT REPLACEMENT ISSUE

OSAF FOR ASST SECRETARY SHRONTZ

REF: OSLO 0726

SUMMARY: LABOR PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP LEADER AND HEAD OF NORWEGIAN DEFENSE REVIEW COMMISSION ODDVAR NORDLI WAS QUOTED ON NORWEGIAN RADIO, FEBRUARY 20 AS SAYING AT NNORDIC COUNCIL MEETING IN REYKJAVIK THAT IT MIGHT BE ANOTHER YEAR OR TWO BEFORE NORWAY PICKS A REPLACEMENT FIGHTER. ASKED FOR EXPLANATION OF THIS STATEMENT, DEFENSE MINISTER FOSTERVOLL TOLD ME TODAY (FEBRUARY 21) THAT CABINET IS STILL WAITING FOR REPORT FROM DEFENSE REVIEW COMMISSION BEFORE TAKING ANY DECISION, AND THAT EVEN IF NORDLI SAID WHAT HE IS QUOTED AS SAYING, HIS VIEWS WILL NOT NECESSARILY PREVAIL. FOSTERVOLL NOTED THAT NORDLI'S REMARKS SINCE HIS RETURN FROM ICELAND WERE MUCH LESS CATEGORIC AND SAID HE IS NOT PESSIMISTIC

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ABOUT OUTCOME OF NORWEGIAN CABINET MEETING, NOW EXPECTED SOMETIME

NEXT WEEK. END SUMMARY.

1. NORWEGIAN RADIO CARRIED INTERVIEW WITH NORDLI ON FEBRUARY 20 WITH REPRESENTATIVE OF SWEDISH RADIO. INTERVIEWER BEGAN BY QUOTING NORDLI AS HAVING STATED IN REYKJAVIK THAT "DECISION ON PURCHASE OF COMBAT FIGHTER... WILL NOT BE REACHED FOR ANOTHER YEAR OR TWO." IN HIS RESPONSE, NORDLI NOTED THAT NORWAY WOULD HAVE TO REPLACE AIRCRAFT IN A "FEW YEARS;" THAT "WE MUST TAKE TIME TO STUDY" PROBLEM IN CONTEXT "OF OUR ENTIRE DEFENSE SYSTEM AND AS PART OF COMMON DEFENSE SYSTEM IN EUROPE;" THAT PURCHASE WILL NEED TO BE HANDLED "ACCORDING TO CUSTOMARY PROCEDURES" WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT AND STARTING; AND THAT IT IS NOT QUESTION OF WHETHER OR NOT TO COOPERATE IN JOINT WEST EUROPEAN DEFENSE SYSTEM BUT OF EVALUATING MAJOR PURCHASE WITHIN CONTEXT OF ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK LOOKING AHEAD TO ABOUT 1990. ASKED HOW LONG THIS DECISION WILL TAKE NORDLI REPLIED EVASIVELY, "IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO SAY... THE NORWEGIAN AUTHORITIES MUST HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE THE TIME THEY NEED TO STUDY THE MATTER."

2. I PROMPTLY CALLED FOSTERVOLL TODAY TO ASK HOW WE SHOULD READ NORDLI'S STATEMENT. HE NOTED THAT, EVEN IF NORDLI HAS SAID "ONE OR TWO YEARS" WHILE IN REYKJAVIK, HE BACKED DOWN CONSIDERABLY IN HIS SUBSEQUENT INTERVIEW, AND HE EMPHASIZED THAT BATTLE IS FAR FROM LOST. CABINET HAS NOT EVEN TAKEN UP THE CASE YET SINCE IT IS WAITING TO EXAMINE A REPORT BEING PREPARED BY THE FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE DEFENSE MINISTRY AND PRESENT SECRETARY OF THE DEFENSE REVIEW COMMISSION, ERIC HIMLE. THE CABINET IS EXPECTED TO MEET ON THE QUESTION SOMETIME NEXT WEEK. A PARALLEL QUERY BY OUR MAAG CHIEF TO THE BUREAU CHIEF IN CHARGE OF INDUSTRIAL COOPERATION IN THE DEFENSE MINISTRY BROUGHT A SIMILAR REASSURING RESPONSE I.E. THAT THE MINISTRY UNDERSTOOD NORDLI TO BE SAYING SIMPLY THAT EXAMINATION OF THE ISSUE REQUIRED FOLLOWING PROPER PROCEDURES WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT BUT DID NOT EXCLUDE A DECISION WITHIN THE NEXT TWO MONTHS.

3. WHILE FOSTERVOLL SEEMED HOPEFUL THAT HE COULD CARRY THE DAY AGAINST NORDLI SO FAR AS ANY NORWEGIAN DECISION WAS CONCERNED, HE WAS FRANKLY DISCOURAGED BY THE MOST RECENT MINISTERS OF DEFENSE MEETING IN BRUSSELS. HE FOUND VAN DEN DOEYNANTS CLEARLY HOPING CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT SOMEHOW THE ANSWERS FROM THE U.S. AND FRANCE TO THE MOST RECENT ROUND OF QUESTIONS WOULD RELIEVE HIM OF THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR AN AGONIZING DECISION. HE ALSO FOUND DUTCH MOD VREDELING OBVIOUSLY SICK AS WELL AS UNNERVED BY THE PROSPECT OF HAVING TO DEFEND WHATEVER DECISION HE MIGHT MAKE AT HIS FORTHCOMING PARTY CONGRESS.

4. COMMENT: NORDLI'S POORLY TIMED REMARKS (PERHAPS EXAGGERATED

BY SWEDISH RADIO FOR OBVIOUS SELF-INTEREST) CAN BE EXPLAINED BY HIS POSITION AS CHAIRMAN OF DEFENSE REVIEW COMMISSION. IT WAS PLANNED THAT NORDLI WOULD USE THIS POSITION TO STRENGTHEN HIS ROLE AS MAJOR CONTENDER TO REPLACE BRATTELI AS PRIME MINISTER, INEVITABLY, THERE IS SOME FEELING ON PART OF NORDLI AND MEMBERS OF COMMISSION THAT ANY MAJOR DECISIONS ABOUT NEW WEAPONS SHOULD AWAIT RESULTS OF MAJOR REVIEW. NORDLI IS FRONT-RUNNER TO REPLACE BRATTELI, HOWEVER, REGARDLESS OF HIS ROLE ON THE REVIEW COMMISSION, AND CAN BE EXPECTED TO ACCEPT WHATEVER BRATTELI AND REST OF CABINET FEEL TO BE IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST.

5. I AM CONFIDENT THAT FOSTERVOLL WILL ARGUE STRONGLY FOR A DECISION NOW TO PURCHASE F-16. HE IS NATURALLY CONCERNED THAT ANY HINT OF NORWEGIAN INDECISION MIGHT PROVIDE BELGIUM AND HOLLAND WITH READY EXCUSE TO DROP OUT OF THE CONSORTIUM; IF HE CAN PERSUADE THEM TO OPT FOR THE F-16, HE WOULD HAVE LITTLE PROBLEM PERSUADING NORWEGIAN CABINET TO MAKE THIS SAME DECISION NOW, RATHER THAN A YEAR FROM NOW. FOSTERVOLL HOPES THAT, WHATEVER WE MAY HAVE TO SAY IN REPLY TO THE LATEST SERIES OF QUESTIONS, THE CASE FOR AN EARLY DECISION IN FAVOR OF THE F-16 WILL BE STRENGTHENED.

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